

HERMENEUTICAL PROBLEMS IN LITERARY CRITICISM

By: Rachmat Nurchahyo

Faculty of Languages and Arts - Yogyakarta State University

Abstrak: permasalahan interpretasi karya sastra untuk mendapatkan makna terhadap karya tersebut merupakan permasalahan yang terus menerus muncul. Hal ini dikarenakan adanya kesenjangan budaya, sejarah, dan nilai-nilai sosial antara pembaca dan penulis teks. Terkait dengan aliran kritik sastra yang digunakan untuk menganalisis karya sastra, terdapat hubungan yang jelas antara pendekatan hermeneutic dan delapan aliran kritik sastra. **Critical hermeneutics** dekat hubungannya dengan kritik feminis and Marsis. **Critical hermeneutics** juga menggunakan pendekatan psikologi. **Dialogical hermeneutics** berhubungan erat dengan kritik reader-response. **Conservative hermeneutics** sangat terkait dengan kritik biografi. **Radical hermeneutics** berhubungan dengan dekonstruksi.

Pendekatan hermeneutik Gadamer memberi peluang kepada pembaca untuk dapat menghubungkan keadaan lampau dan sekarang, sehingga mampu mengurangi distorsi makna. Kegiatan ini hanya bisa dilakukan dengan menggunakan interpretasi yang mempertimbangkan keadaan dulu, sekarang, dan aplikasinya terhadap nilai masyarakat sekarang. Dengan kata lain, interpretasi dapat dilakukan dengan melalui level teks, konteks, dan kontekstualisasi. Level-level inilah yang dapat digunakan untuk menjembatani pemahaman **meaning** dan **significance** dalam pendekatan hermeneutik.

Key words: hermeneutic, literary criticism

Introduction

Hermeneutics derives from the Greek *hermeneutika*, "message analysis", or "things for interpreting" — the interpretation of tradition, the messages we receive from the past. Hermeneutics is usually applied to areas where tradition is considered important in people's lives — religious texts, legal precedents, and so on. It is usually applied to text, but Derrida has pioneered its application to other media (Sumaryono, 1999: 23-24).

The term 'hermeneutics' comes from a Greek myth. God had a messenger whose name was Hermes, who got a dilemma when God, speaking the language of heaven, ordered him to explain God's will to human beings. The problem faced by Hermes was that no body would understand the message when he repeated the God's order in the language of heaven. If he used human language, the message would be distorted. Moreover, some people would be angry with him whenever he was not very careful in articulating God's message. Finally, he realized that he faced three different subjects with different manner and inclination. They were God, Hermes himself, and the readers. Hermes' main task was to transmute what was beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence could grasp. Therefore, hermeneutics deals with the process of bringing a thing or situation from unintelligibility to understanding.

Hermeneutics as an interpretation theory is defined as the theory, rather than the practice of interpretation. Initially, concerned with how we interpret texts, hermeneutics in the nineteenth century becomes the theory of understanding itself, dealing with texts only as one example of the event of understanding between persons. In the twentieth century hermeneutics no longer concerns itself exclusively with the understanding and interpretation of written documents or speech. The aim of understanding is not focused on the communication with or the psychology of another person. Hermeneutics, following Heidegger, explores a realm that is prior to the separation of the natural sciences from the human sciences.

B. Defining the Problem

This paper focuses on two problems, first, specifying the characteristics of literary criticism, which absolutely includes language of literature, second, applying the hermeneutics approach to the understanding of literary works. Hermeneutics can be said as a bridge of understanding. The process of bringing understanding always assumes 'interpretation', whether it takes a form of explaining, translating, or rewording. Therefore, one of the epistemological problems in hermeneutics is to demonstrate that the interpretation reveals the true meaning of the text and that its readers have correctly understood it.

The role of interpretation must be to make something which is unfamiliar in meaning real and intelligible. The problem, however, becomes broader when it is applied and directed to understanding the complexity of human life as reflected in literary works. In interpreting the text, one thing that should be kept in mind is that no text is free from any sociological and psychological biases (Gadamer, 1994: 270). Therefore, the big problems are the justification that a certain text reveals the truth and the understanding of the readers. If we put the problems into the field of literary criticism, it is, then, how do we know the mind of the writer when he/she revealed the works bound by socio-historical context? How do the language of the writer and today readers meet and fuse into one another and then are written in literary criticism? This paper approaches the problems from a hermeneutical point of view, using Gadamerian paradigm.

C. Gadamerian Hermeneutics

To know Gadamer, we cannot leave what his teacher, Heidegger, thought. The purpose of Heidegger's deconstruction was to recover prior or primordial forms of a living tradition, and the issues that led to its formation. Heidegger's main concern was the dialogue that led to the Aristotelean static concept of "is". Heidegger enhanced static "is" with a rich, dynamic concept of being that allows us to,

for example, talk about Darwin's algorithm in philosophical circles without being accused of "tautology".

There have been several superficial crypto-Marxist philosophies constructed using a gloss of Heideggerian language, such as Sartre, Derrida, et. al., but I take these only as a cautionary tale to balance Heidegger's influence on Gadamer, who is probably the most eloquent and thoughtful defender of tradition in our time.

Gadamer saw the value of his teacher Heidegger's dynamic analysis, and put it in the service of studying living traditions, that is to say traditions with useful applications. Gadamer discussed the classical as a broad normative concept denoting that is the basis of a liberal education. He discussed his historical process of *Behahrung*, cumulative preservation, that, through constantly improving itself, allows something true to come into being. In the terms of evolutionary hermeneutics, it is used and propagated because of its useful application, and its useful application constitutes its truth. Gadamer also discussed value in terms of the duration of a work's power to speak directly. This involves two dimensions: time and accessibility.

The success of Derrida — following "deconstructionists" in defaming tradition — stems in large part from traditionalist's technological inferiority, their lack of skill in using the hermeneutical tools of Heidegger and Gadamer. The good news is that anti-traditionalist hermeneutics is self-destructive; seeing no value in tradition it will accumulate none of its own. It will thus remain superficial. Their drive to work out their post-Marxist frustrations by intellectually vandalizing tradition will soon be spent, and they will move on to something else.

Gadamer provides an in depth treatment of how to go about doing a historical/hermeneutical analysis, along with why it is important. Gadamer's analysis is not complete without being synthesized with rational terms, accessible to those who demand objective or scientific reasoning (Sumaryono, 1999: 83).

D. Hermeneutics and Literary Criticism

Many scholars believe that there is a close link between hermeneutics and literary criticism. It is based on the similar characteristics of both of them toward the text. Literary criticism needs to describe, decode or even deconstruct the text. Hermeneutics searches the true meaning of the text. Therefore, the similarities result in four schools of hermeneutics thought. First, the conservative hermeneutics which embraces the idea that a complete understanding can be attained if a set of specific guidelines, or rules, are followed (an emphasis on truth and objectivity). Second, the critical hermeneutics <http://www.canisius.edu/~gallagher/ahcri.html> which proposes that interpretation is shaped by political, economic, and social forces, including biases linked to race, class, and gender. It also emphasizes on critical reflection and communication a means to escape such biases. Third, the dialogical hermeneutics which becomes the idea that truth emerges in the hermeneutical situation which is characterized by a dialogical relationship between the interpreter and the text. Fourth, the radical hermeneutics which includes Derrida's deconstructive approach (Groden and Kreiswort, 1994).

To understand deeper about the link, it is necessary to understand the approaches of literary thought. At least, there are eight approaches that are needed to broaden the understanding of literary texts. They are:

1. **Feminist Literary Criticism:** The understanding, analysis of, and response to literary works and/ or language, and/ or the institution of literary study or literary theory from the point of view of women's experience (Harris, 1992: 89);
2. **Marxist Literary Criticism:** Any criticism of literature based on the major principles of Karl Marx's analysis of history and social structure. These principles include the idea "that history primarily reflects a continuing struggle between socioeconomic classes"(Harris, 1992: 207);

3. **Myth Criticism:** assessment of the role of classical mythology in literary texts/ the recognition of mythic patterns in a specific literary work (Harris, 1992: 244);
4. **Psychological/ Psychoanalytic Criticism:** the use of psychology or psychiatric theory to explain, for example, the origin of a literary work in the individual author's mind, the thoughts and actions of a character in a literary work; or readers' responses (Harris, 1992: 304);
5. **Reader-response Theory and Criticism:** takes the existence of the reader as a decisive component of any meaningful literary analysis/ an emphasis on the reader's construction of the meanings he or she finds in a text but differing in their explanations of the ways in which such construction takes place (Harris, 1992: 318);
6. **Deconstruction Theory:** a mode of reading based on the principle that linguistic signs cannot be linked to extralinguistic reality but are instead components of the ultimately self-contradictory structure of language (Harris, 1992: 57);
7. **Biographical Criticism:** the basic assumption of this school of thought is that the chief clues to a person's work can be found in the study of his or her own life, personality and character (Hyman, 1955: 93).

There are two similarities between hermeneutics thought and literary thought. First, both criticism and hermeneutics deal with the investigation of the origin and accuracy of texts. Second, both criticism, in certain instances, and hermeneutics, in certain instances, are in a sense of "explication" of the meaning of a particular text. Differences resulted from the two matters above are that criticism deals primarily with texts, (literary criticism specifically with works of literature), while hermeneutics is not limited to the written word, but deals also with the spoken words, communication among persons, and the apprehension of an actual truth. Moreover, criticism evaluates "the merit of a text" while hermeneutics does not necessarily take into consideration the literary worth of a text, or the skills of a particular author. Rather,

hermeneutics (on a conservative definition) tries to ascertain the intentions of the author when he or she wrote the text.

Considering the relation between hermeneutics and literary criticism, an important question emerges; do the four approaches to hermeneutics (conservative, critical, dialogical, and radical) correspond to the variety of approaches to literary criticism? To answer this, analysis on each approach related to each literary criticism is a must. Critical hermeneutics seems to find correspondences to feminist and Marxist criticism. Certain schools of critical hermeneutics employ psychological (psychoanalytic) approaches. Dialogical hermeneutics is linked to reader-response criticism. Conservative hermeneutics would seem to embrace biographical and perhaps folk criticism. Radical hermeneutics is quite clearly connected with deconstructive criticism.

Can one use the four approaches to hermeneutics (conservative, critical, dialogical, and radical) to classify the variety of approaches to literary criticism? Richard Palmer's essay, "Thirty Theses on Interpretation," suggests that all criticisms or interpretations of literary texts inevitably fall under the dialogical school of hermeneutics. He makes an assertion that no matter from what angle an interpreter may attempt to approach a text, his/ her interaction with the text is automatically dialogical. Although in some respects literary hermeneutics and literary criticism have many things in common, when applied to particular texts they differ substantially. Certain hermeneutical approaches (dialogical, critical, and radical) are wider in scope, more philosophical and not limited to textual analysis. Literary criticism works strictly with texts, and strictly with literary texts, evaluating them for both their artistic worth and intrinsic message. To go beyond a limited scope of the texts, scholars apply the approach of hermeneutics in analyzing literary works. The activity of interpretation is significant in any literary criticism. It does need a method. Some interpretations deal with historical events, in which the interpreter must relate his/her interpretation to the texts

created long time before. In this case, hermeneutics plays the role.

3. Discussion

Discussing literary criticism cannot put aside the language within the literary works. Language is 'the heart' of the literary works. Therefore, analyzing literary works using hermeneutics approach will always deal with language. According to Heidegger (1977), language is the house of being. Language comes into being when expression and meaning are brought together. Language is the totality of its expression together with the totality of the meaning.

There are at least three theories concerning the nature of language; naturalist theory, conventionalist theory, and revelationist theory. The first theory is that language has its origin in a natural affinity between expression and the things signified. The second theory is based on the idea that language is a social convention and it is basically arbitrary. The revelationist theory is that God created language and then taught human beings (Ichwan, 2000: 18). It is not easy for us to verify which one of the theories above is more legitimate than the other. One thing is certain. All languages can be described as social and cultural conventions.

The focus of this paper is to analyze the position of literary texts and its relation with the readers within the expanding textual web in the written culture. In the context of literary criticism, the notion of text tends to be the printed or written document. Literary works are not the dead sign anymore. They are living and become historical phenomena. Therefore, the study of literary works deals closely with the historical context of the writer. The language and meaning of literary works belong to the writers. However, the readers need to understand for the sake of getting values from the works. The critics tend to ignore the intention of the writer when he/ she wrote the works. In this regard, scholars propose to use hermeneutics approach which is considered appropriate in relating past

and present. It is like Gadamer's view that hermeneutics is an attempt to overcome the alienating distinction, to relate the dialogue between the present and the past.

The phenomenon of the literary works as the living text leads to the hermeneutical discussion of how the works that were written in the past and 'conceived' as writers' idea fit and match our cognitive and historical situation in the 21st century. Literary criticism cannot be separated from its objects, literary works. Literary works as the text lead to the hermeneutical discussion of how the works were written in past. The major of hermeneutical method is re-living and re-thinking the thoughts and feeling of the author. However, some problems emerge. How can we know the historicity of some ahistorical authors? How can we trace and interpret the thought of the authors of folklores? This is an example of hermeneutical problem, that is, how to bridge the gap between authors, texts, and readers. In interpreting the texts, we are faced by the permanent question in hermeneutics, that is: can we interpret the meaning of texts purely with reference to their language; or purely with reference to their authors' intention; or does the textual meaning reside somehow in the inter-relation or interaction between both? (Thiselton, 1992: 206). As what Gadamer suggests, a text is best read as a response to questions. Hence, as we are reading a text we are engaged in a conversation. In doing so, however, a problem arises, that is, to struggle against the cultural distance and historical alienation means to make the interpreter ready and open-minded to the event of interpretation in which a dialogue with authors happens.

The notion above suggests that the model of interpretation cannot be applied as it is applied in natural sciences. In natural sciences, the model of interpretation emphasizes the power of the reason of the subject. The criteria and justification of "truth-claim" are based on a pure reason constructed and set by an alienated subject. Psychological and historical hermeneutics are very helpful in interpreting and understanding a text. However, an objectification of the text is not allowed because both text

nd we are the products of a given tradition which is shaped by given prejudices along the course of history. History and tradition always invite new interpretations. Therefore, the knowledge of history cannot be objective, because its interpreter always expands its "object." With regard to the literary text, there is a chain of tradition and values, and its meaning and truth are an unfinished process. The value in literary text is continuously affected, brought about, enriched, and realized by the understanding of the readers, and indeed, all understanding is ultimately self-understanding. This notion implies that in the act of understanding there is always a projection of oneself on it. Does it not mean that hermeneutics lead to relativism? It depends on what we interpret 'relativism'. Going back to the role of Hermes, the understanding of the text is relative because all human understanding is psychologically and historically situated within a finite perspective.

Using the Gadamerian paradigm, a literary text is like a traveler who comes from "somewhere in time," encounters the readers and then invites them to engage in a conversation or enter into discourse. Since both the text and the reader come from different times, cultures, languages, and ideological interests, they have to introduce themselves each other and share their views. To know the literary text, the reader will be guided first by its language including grammar and semiotics that have very important roles in guiding the reader when entering the garden of meanings. Another guide is the historical and psychological map of the authors. Hermeneutics encourages reciprocal listening, tolerance and mutual respect between the mind of the literary text and the mind of the readers. Both of them will be in, as Gadamer call, the fusion of horizon. To have a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. Those who do not have horizon do not see far enough and hence overvalue what is nearest to them. Concerning a literary text, how far we do we enlarge our horizon by interpreting the text. There are at least four types of interpreting: 1) interpretation as deciphering meaning, which means deciphering a meaning

which is the correct or unique meaning; 2) interpretation as deciphering a second meaning, which is furnished by the interpreter, a meaning added to, or substituted for a first literal meaning; 3) interpretation as supplementary meaning, that is to say, that deciphering the permanent possibilities of the text which always has a plurality of meaning; 4) interpretation as something other than deciphering, namely inventing meaning (Faiz, 2003: 73).

The dialectic of questions and answers suggests the reciprocal relation of a conversation as a model for the hermeneutics phenomenon. Of course, the relation between the interpreter and the text is not really a communication between two persons, but rather a conversation in two common spheres of meaning — to understand the text which was born in the past and in a different culture, means to invite it into our context and then to establish a shared view.

In relation to literary criticism, the problems of interpretation elaborated above cannot be separated from what people believe in the existence of meaning and significance — a view advanced by Hirsch. Can we just believe the meaning or value advanced by the authors of the literary texts? Consider again the gap between them and us! So, are we only allowed to take meanings or values coming from the interpreters? Will it create blurred meanings? In this case, the distinction between the meaning from the text (author) and the meaning resulted from the communication between the text and reader is very central. To understand this concept, it is worthwhile to mention Hirsch's theory of meaning and significance, referred to by Ichwan (2000: 29).

It is not the meaning of the text which changes, but its significance to the author. This distinction is too often ignored. *Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that

meaning and a person, or a perception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable....

In brief, meaning is that which is presented by the text, and significance is the relationship between the meaning and the reader. In other words, meaning is the original meaning, which is almost fixed because of its historicity, and significance is changeable. This is in line with what Gadamer's view of 'relating past and present' because what Hirsch calls as changeable meaning is an effort to put the contextual meaning.

In accordance with the view above, Faiz (2003: 89-115) suggests the levels of interpretation. He tries to relate the past and the present and tries to grab both on meaning and on significance. Textual interpretation is the first level. It deals with anything in the text. Contextual interpretation deals with the context of history and society in the era the texts were written. Consideration of things beyond the text is needed. The last, contextualization, tries to put the meaning of the text into the today context. This is a similar position to the changeable meaning in hermeneutics.

F. Conclusion

Literary criticism will always deal with interpretation. Interpretation is the core of the hermeneutics approach. The relation between literary criticism and hermeneutics creates a problem on how to understand the text. To understand them, taking into account the similarities between hermeneutics thought and literary thought will be useful. Both criticism and hermeneutics deal with the investigation of the origin and accuracy of texts. Both criticism are in a sense of "explication" of the meaning of a particular text. Differences resulted from the two matters above are that criticism deals primarily with texts, specifically with works of literature, while hermeneutics is not limited to the written words, but deals also with the spoken words, communication among persons, and the apprehension of an actual truth. Moreover, criticism evaluates "the merit of a text" while hermeneutics does not necessarily take into

consideration the literary worth of a text, or the skills of a particular author.

At least, eight approaches are needed to broaden the understanding of literary texts. They have a close link to the hermeneutics approach. Critical hermeneutics seems to find correspondences to feminist and Marxist criticisms. Certain schools of critical hermeneutics employ psychological (psychoanalytic) approaches. Dialogical hermeneutics is linked to reader-response criticism. Conservative hermeneutics would seem to embrace biographical and perhaps folk criticism. Radical hermeneutics is quite clearly connected with deconstructive criticism.

The discussion of literary criticism and hermeneutics leads to the process of deciphering meaning in literary works. Using Gadamerian hermeneutics, the text interpretation must be able to relate the present and the past. However, in any interpretation, distortion happens. It is because of the gap of history, culture, and social values. Therefore, this problem of interpretation in literary criticism becomes the hermeneutical problem in literary criticism. In the effort to solve the problem, the process of interpretation could be defined as the following: 1) interpretation as deciphering meaning; 2) interpretation as deciphering a second meaning; 3) interpretation as supplementary meaning; 4) interpretation as something other than deciphering, namely inventing meaning. To relate the present and the past, three levels of interpretation can be employed. They are textual, contextual interpretation, and contextualization. This is also an effort to deal with the meaning and the significance in literary texts.

References

- Faiz, Fakhruddin. 2003. *HERMENEUTIKA QUR'ANI: Antara Teks, Konteks, dan Kontektualisasi*. Yogyakarta: Qalam.
- Gadamer, Hans-George. 1994. *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum.

IRONY AND SYMBOLISM IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S THE LOTTERY

By: Hartati Widiastuti

LC - Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas mengenai ironi dan simbolisme dalam cerita pendek yang berjudul The Lottery yang ditulis oleh seorang pengarang perempuan terkenal, Shirley Jackson. Cerita pendek ini dipilih untuk dianalisa karena merupakan karya Shirley Jackson yang paling terkenal. Tradisi yang diadakan di sebuah kota kecil telah menjadi ritual tahunan dan telah berlangsung selama beberapa generasi sejak desa itu berdiri. Ironi dalam cerita pendek ini dapat dilihat dari pernyataan verbal tokoh, situasi, sudut pandang pengarang dan peristiwa yang tidak terduga. Aspek-aspek simbolisme ada pada nama-nama tokoh, kotak hitam, kertas undian, titik hitam pada kertas undian dan batu yang sangat besar.

Key words: tradition, the lottery, irony, symbolism, black box, slips of paper.

A. Introduction

Every society has an interesting and unique tradition. The society usually has been conducted the tradition for years. Tradition in one certain place can be similar to the one in other places. According to Essential English Dictionary, tradition is the passing of beliefs and custom from one generation to the next. Unfortunately, the history of a tradition and the reason of conducting the tradition in a society may have been unknown. However, a tradition then turns into an annual ritual which is always conducted on certain time. Such tradition is narrated in *The Lottery* written by Shirley Jackson. Ritual is a set of actions performed on certain special occasions as a custom or tradition (Higgleto, 1995).

yo: Hermeneutical Problems in Literary Criticism

an and Kreiswort, ed. 1994. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

s, Wendall V. 1992. *The Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*. New York: Greenwood Press.

egger, Martin. 1977. *Basic Writing*. New York: Harper & Row.

an, Stanley Edgar. 1955. *The Armed Vision*. New York: Vintage Books.

an, Much Nur. 2000. Beyond Ideological interpretation. *Al Jami'ah*. Hal 14 - 38.

aryono, E. 1999. *HERMENEUTIK. Sebuah Metode Filsafat*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.

elton, Anthony. 1992. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. Michigan: zondervan Publishing House.